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THE LOVE STORY OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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Those to whom every incident in the life of Florence Nightingale is of interest must often have wondered whether the idea of a home and children of her own did not appeal to her, or whether in her life of self-sacrifice there was no room for thought of love and marriage.

Her biographer says, "A man of affairs, who in the course of a long and varied life had come in contact with many of the acutest intellects and greatest administrators of the time, said of Miss Nightingale that hers was the clearest brain he had ever known in man or woman." How did this clear brain regard the question that, take it all in all, is the most important in a woman's life?

She was no recluse, she mixed with society and had every opportunity of meeting clever and agreeable people. It was said of her that she was attractive and attracted both men and women. Julia Ward Howe, who visited her in 1844, wrote that she was rather elegant than beautiful, tall and graceful of figure, her countenance mobile and expressive, her conversation most interesting.

Her friend, Mrs. Gaskell, the novelist, author of *Cranford*, described her as "tall, very straight and willowy in figure; thick, shortish, rich brown hair; very delicate complexion; grey eyes, which are generally pensive and drooping, but when they choose can be the merriest eyes I ever saw; perfect teeth, making her smile the sweetest I ever saw." Again, "She has a great deal of fun, and mimics most capitally." Surely a charming woman!

The maternal instinct was strong in her, as it is in most good nurses. It went out in almost passionate fulness to a young cousin, William Shore Smith, eleven years her junior. She called him her boy, and she was successively his nurse, playfellow and tutor. "The son of my heart," she called him. "When he is with me all that is mine is his, my head and hands and time."

In a letter to a friend, congratulating her upon her recent marriage, she says:

Should we not look on marriage less as an absolute blessing than as a remove into another and higher class of this great school room, a promotion, for it is a promotion, which creates new duties, before which the coward sometimes shrinks, and gives new lessons, of more advanced knowledge, with more advanced

powers to meet them, and a much clearer power of vision to read them? I think the day will come when it will surprise us as much to see people dressing up for a marriage, as it would to see them putting on a fine coat for the sacrament. Why should the sacrament, or oath, of marriage be less sacred than any other?

In her diary she wrote, in 1850: "I might have been a literary woman, or a married woman, or a Hospital Sister." Why did she not choose the second path? Her biographer says that Miss Nightingale's remaining single was not the result of a lack of opportunity to marry. She did not marry because she held fast to an ideal. One of her cousins was much attached to her and wished to marry her. She was in no sense in love with him and felt "relief intense and unmixed," as she recorded herself, when the young man had at last forgotten her. "Cleanse all my love from the desire of creating an interest in another's heart," is the burden of many of her meditations. A deeper and more searching test was to come.

A man came into her life who fell deeply in love with her; he proposed to her and continued for some years to press his suit. It was a proposal which seemed to those about her to promise every happiness. The match would have been deemed suitable by all, by many it might have been called brilliant. We are not told his name. Florence Nightingale herself was strongly drawn to her admirer; she admired his talents and the more she saw of him the greater pleasure she found in his society. She leaned more and more upon his sympathy. Yet when he first proposed to her she refused him and when he persisted she still rejected him. It may be said she can not have been in love with him. In one sense that is possibly quite true, for love, as the poets tell us, does not reason, and she reasoned deeply over her case. It is certain that she felt at least as much affection as suffices to make half the marriages in the world. No, she turned away from a path to which she was strongly drawn in order to pursue her ideal.

Years before, she had written to her cousin, Hilary Bonham Carter:

It strikes me that in all the most unworldly poetry (both prose and verse) *la passion qu'on appelle inclination* is treated in a very extraordinary way. When one finds a comparative stranger becoming all of a sudden more essential to one than one's family (via flattery in general of one sort or another) one is content with saying to oneself, "Oh! that's love," instead of saying, "How unjust and blind this feeling is." I wonder if people were to examine, for as Socrates says, the life unexamined is not a living life, they would not find that (whatever it may ripen to afterwards) this feeling at first is generally begun by vanity, or jealousy, or self love; and that what is very much to be guarded against, instead of being submitted to, is the stranger's admiration (and I suppose everybody has been susceptible at one time of their lives) having more effect upon one than one's own family.

When she turned from the man who loved her, and whom she loved or could have loved had she given her feelings free rein, she wrote in explanation:

I have an intellectual nature which requires satisfaction and that would find it in him. I have a passional nature which requires satisfaction and that would find it in him. I have a moral, an active nature which requires satisfaction and that would not find it in his life. I can hardly find satisfaction for any of my natures. Sometimes I think that I will satisfy my passional nature at all events, because that will at least secure me from the evil of dreaming. But would it? I could be satisfied to spend a life with him combining our different powers in some great object. I could not satisfy this nature by spending a life with him in making society and arranging domestic things. Voluntarily to put it out of my power ever to be able to seize the chance of forming for myself a true and rich life would seem to me like suicide.

Yet Florence Nightingale was no vestal ascetic. A true and perfect marriage was, she thought, the perfect state. "Marrying a man of good and high purpose and following out that purpose with him is the highest lot," she says.

She recognized also that for many women, marriage, even though it may fall short of this ideal state, is the proper lot in life. She held, on the other hand, that there are some women who may be destined for a single life. She wrote, in 1846:

I think Providence has as clearly marked out some to be single women, as He has others to be wives, and has organized them accordingly for their vocation. I think some have every reason for not marrying and that for these it is much better to educate the children who are already in the world, and can't be got out of it, than to bring more into it.

Her biographer says:

In her own case Miss Nightingale was conscious of capacities within her for high purposes for mankind and God. She could not feel sure that the marriage that was offered her would enable her to employ those capacities to their best and fullest powers. And so she sacrificed her "passional" nature to her moral ideal.

"I am thirty," she wrote in her diary, on her birthday in 1850, "the age at which Christ began his mission. Now no more childish things, no more vain things, no more love, no more marriage. Now, Lord, let me only think of Thy will."

In another note she says, "Strong passions, to teach the secrets of the human heart, and a strong will to hold them in subjection, these are the keys of the kingdom in this world and the next." She turned away from marriage that she might remain entirely free to fulfil her

vocation. It was not a sacrifice that cost her little. If, as some may think, she was not in love, yet she confessed to herself many of a lover's pangs. There were moments when, as she met her admirer again, or when she thought of him, she was half inclined to repent her choice of a single life. When she made this choice she had no assurance of appointed work, though she was conscious of a call. When she was called upon to choose between the two paths her present life was starvation. Happiness was given her later in her work, filling her life for some years so that she "sought no better heaven," but of this, at that time, she knew nothing.

Perhaps it was the price which she had paid for her ideal that led to what, in later years, some considered a certain hardness in her. When once a woman had devoted her life to the work of nursing, Miss Nightingale had little sympathy with any turning back. She seemed sometimes, in such cases, to regard marriage as the unpardonable sin. Yet there were many acts of individual kindness to nurses at such a time. When Isabel Hampton married Dr. Robb I believe the flowers she carried were the gift of Miss Nightingale.

In 1859, she wrote a strong letter to the newspapers in support of the Volunteer movement. A poor engineer was so impressed that he wrote to offer her "his hand and heart, which are free, only you are so much above me." "It is gratifying to observe," she writes to her uncle, "that this is not the first fruits, but the one-and-fortieth of my Volunteer letter; I could have as many husbands as Mahomet's mother."

Her ideal of friendship was very high and she had many warm and devoted friends. In a letter to Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, she says,

My idea of a friend is one who can join you in work the sole purpose of which is to serve God. And so extraordinarily blessed have I been that I have had three such friends. This is heaven; and that is what makes me say, I have had my heaven.

It is still true that he who loseth his life shall find it. Unselfish devotion to others may bring more happiness than the most diligent striving after personal gratification.